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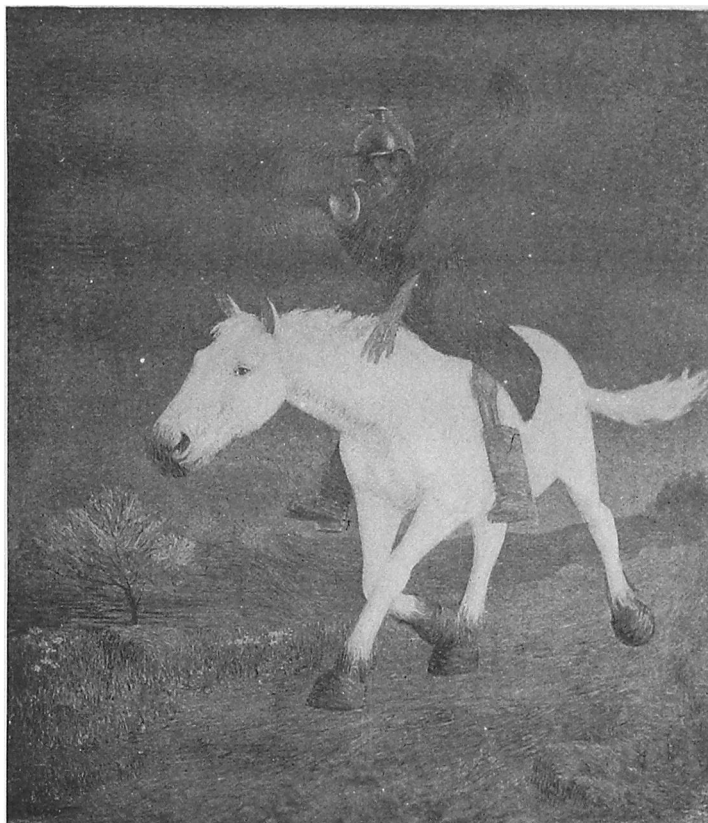
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THE
DECLARA-
TION OF
WAR



BY
BELA
ORMO

THE OMINOUS ADVANCE OF THE EVIL SPIRIT OF GERMAN KULTUR

The Curse of Kultur

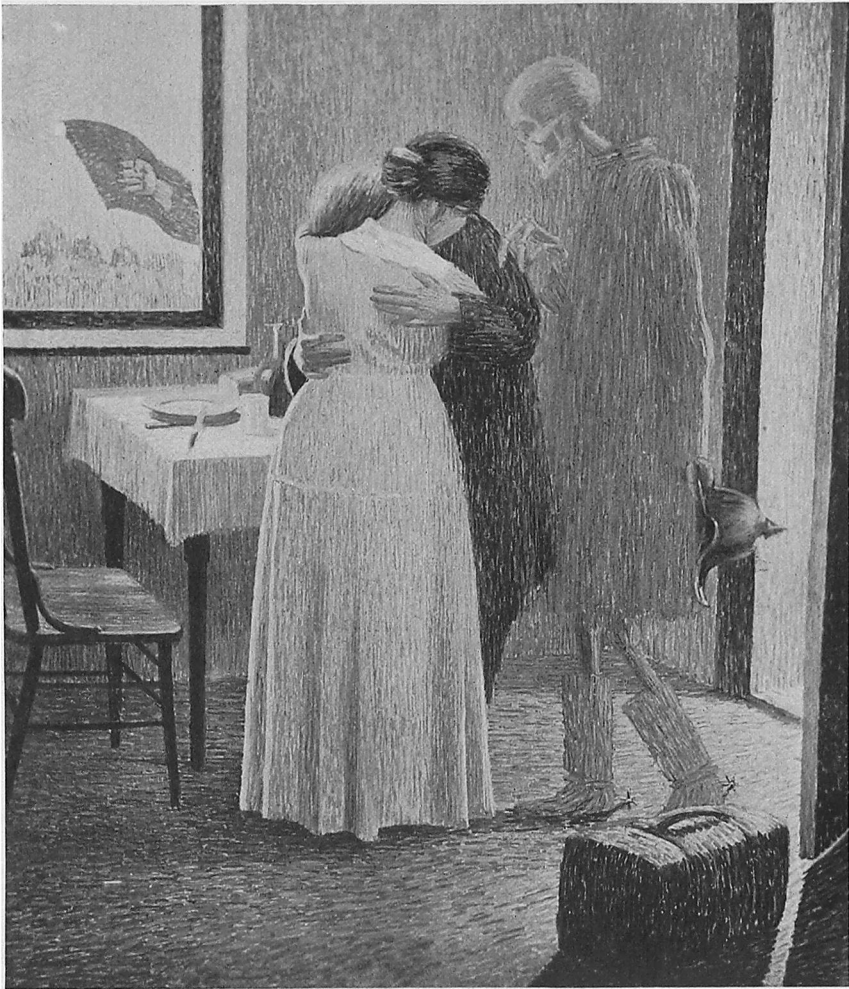
By EVELYN MARIE STUART

WHAT a wonderful thing it is, the American Spirit, and how quickly it seizes and assimilates the foreigner who comes to our shores. Nay, more—it seeks him in his home beyond the seas and leads him hither, it calls in many voices, plays upon many a chord, and those who hear may not tarry. They come and they stay. “You cannot know,” said a Hungarian, “how it is, but when you have been here a few years you know in your heart that you can never go back to stay.”

Recently the Hungarian Patriotic Society was formed in Chicago, composed of both naturalized citizens and those whose neglect to take out papers before the war has made them technically enemy aliens.

Here they found opportunity to show that theirs was not an enemy nor an alien spirit. That, at heart, they were free men, members of the world's democracy.

The formation of the society brought to notice a work on which a Hungarian artist had been engaged since the beginning of the war. Bela Ormo's great series, “The Curse of Kultur,” began to be talked about among those outside the circle of his conationalists to whom it had been known heretofore. The artist was advised and encouraged to place it upon exhibition where all Chicago might see and as a result one of the most unique events that the art world has experienced this season came to pass in the unveiling of these five huge canvases in Æolian Hall on Michigan avenue



BREAKING UP HOME

The First Victims of Kultur, the German People Themselves

Painted by Bela Ormo

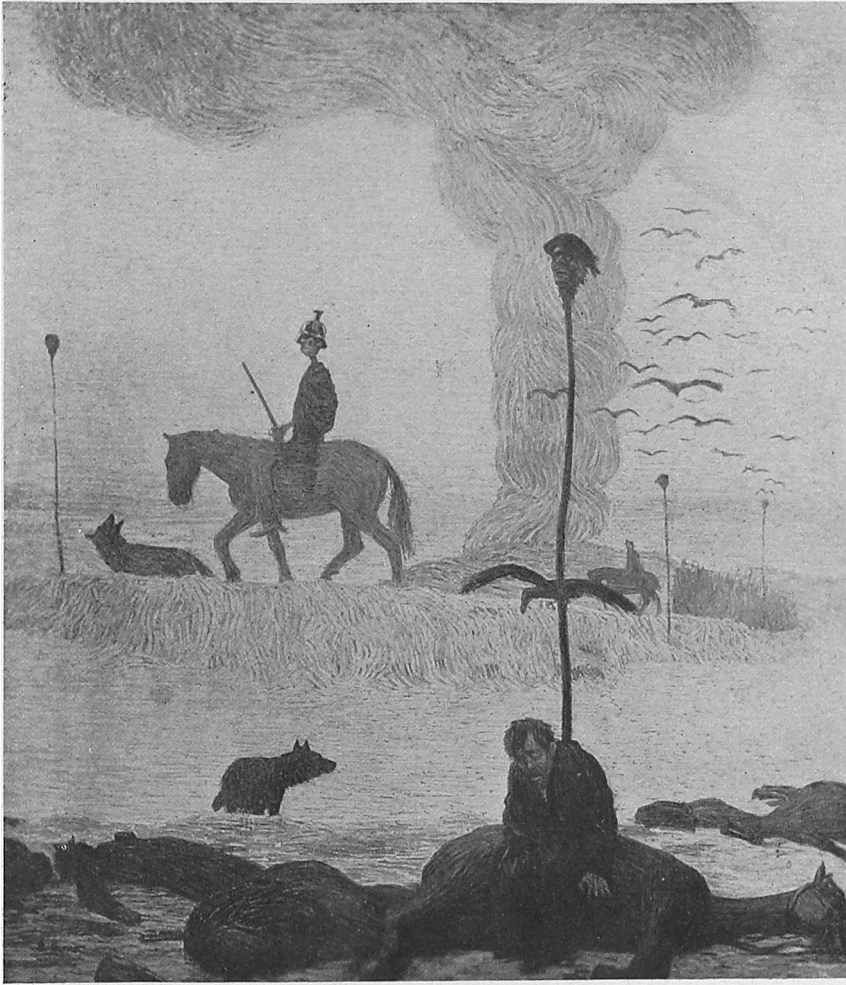
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where they will be on view until July 15.

At the opening reception speakers from the American Red Cross, State Council of Defense and Hungarian Patriotic Society gave point to the message of the pictures, and music was furnished by the Stage Women's War Relief. A general sympathy and interest in this artist and his work seems to prevail with the patriotic societies and the public at large.

We have had indeed many war cartoons, posters and paintings presented for our approval of late, to say nothing of actual photographs and moving pictures, still "The Curse of Kultur" has achieved a place of its own. There is about it something so

absolutely alone and individual. It is so fanciful and yet it makes so real the very spirit of the thing that one is impressed afresh with the purpose of painting, to convey emotion. Truth is in fiction rather than in fact. A single short story well told may give us more insight into a situation or a people than do volumes of statistics. So with art. The painter presents to us the very essence of things, the absolute truth shorn of distracting detail, and nonessential trivialities that tend to confuse. Photographs of battlefields are too complex to be effective, even photographs of dead men in trenches some way have lost the human interest in the camera and all are as but a few



ON THE ROAD TO CONQUEST

Wherever Kultur Passes These Scenes Remain in Its Wake

Painted by Bela Ormo

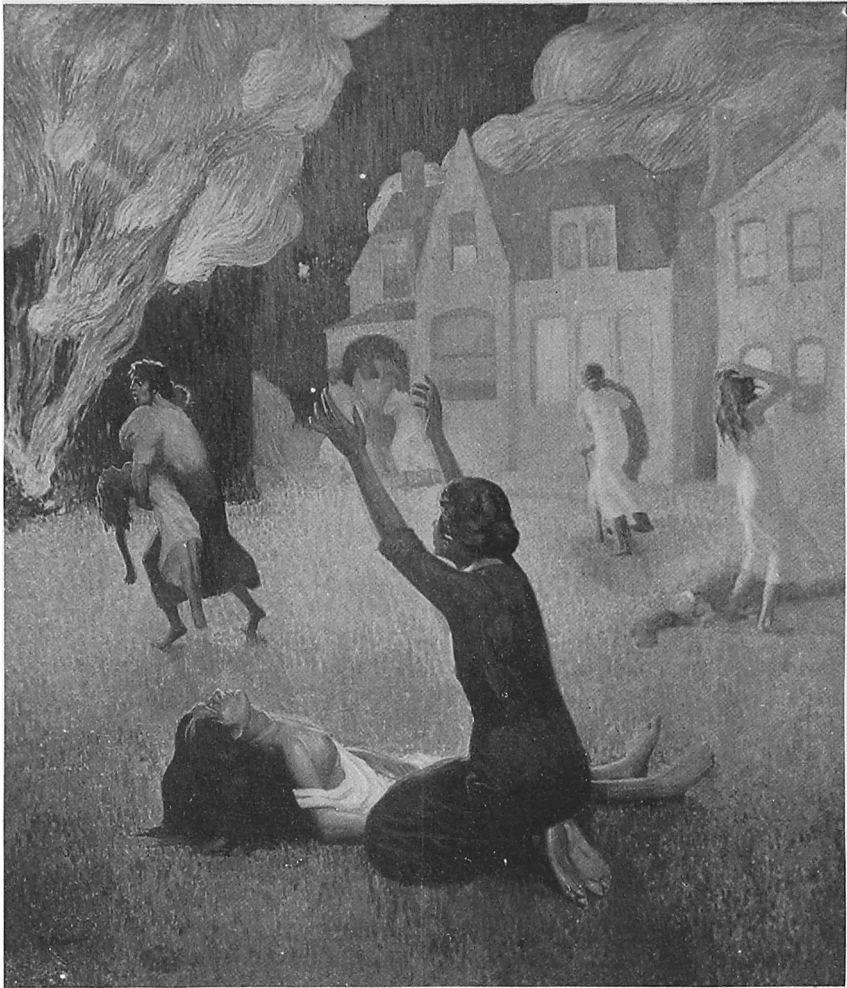
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degrees of an arc which is so large we cannot comprehend it. The war is too big for us. We can only feel it a little at a time.

Then comes the Artist. Alone in his studio he thinks and dreams until he can put upon canvas something that can tell the whole with one symbol, one vivid instance; not too big for our comprehension, but capable of suggesting at a glance the world of things for which it stands.

Do we not feel this when through the sable-draped doorway of this exhibition hall an apparition of Death upon horseback sends an ominous chill across the sensibilities? It is Death in German helmet and

cardinal cloak, calling through a brazen trumpet, and astride a white horse—a curious, sinister beast, released from the plow to stumble with clumsy hoofs over the hearts of the world—a useful, if graceless and ill-bred animal, now grown horrible under the direction of his dread rider. Is he not typical of the German common people? Stolid and solid, and useful and plodding, trampling all that is good and beautiful in civilization under their heavy feet; while, astride their neck, and urging them on, is the hideous spectre of militarism. Is not this the most complete and comprehensive conception possible of the declaration of war and all its menace to mankind?



CONQUEST
The Hideous Methods of Kultur

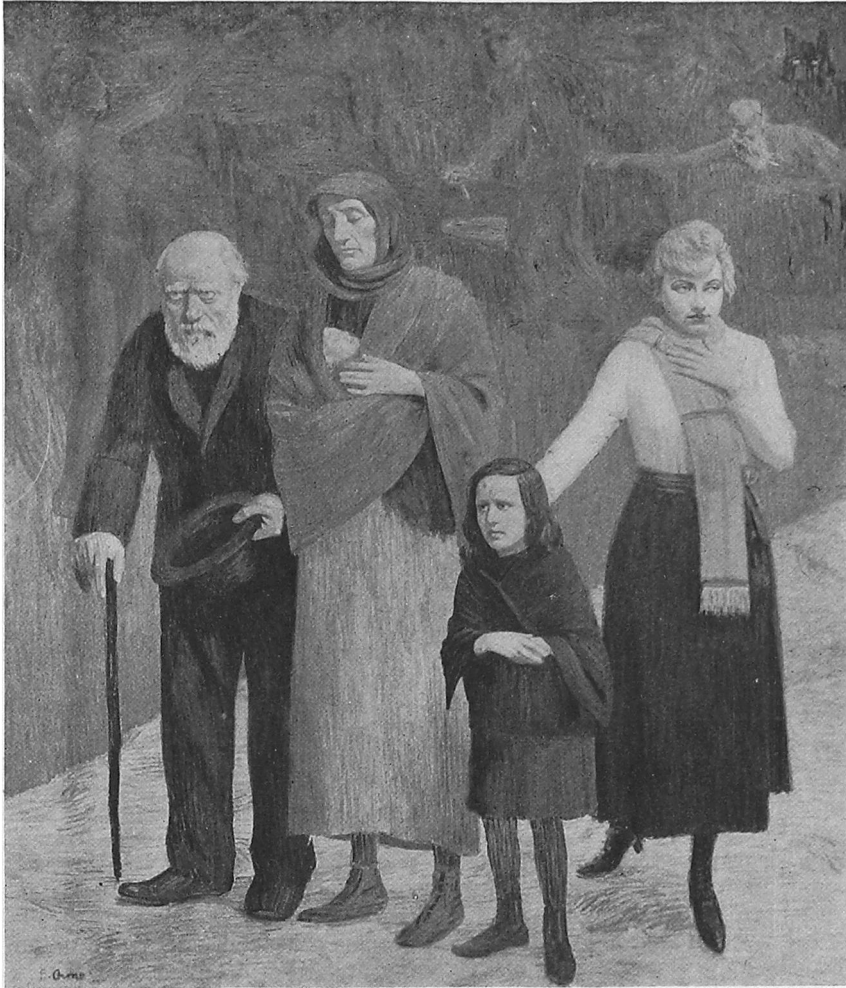
Painted by Bela Ormo
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Again it is the call to the colors, the mobilization of the world. What mind can fully comprehend it? Yet in his picture of "The First Victims of Kultur, the German People Themselves," the artist has chosen just so much of poignant fact as we can grasp at a glance, the humble mother, and her big boyish son in one last farewell embrace. We do not see their faces and this is well considered, for no face can portray and no artist paint all that one mother feels, let alone the mothers of the world. From out of the shadows steps Death, his long bony fingers clutching the young man's shoulder and through the windows we see the monotonous ranks of the field grey un-

der the banner of the mailed fist.

"On the Road to Conquest," and we see where Kultur has passed, leaving a feast for the buzzard and the jackal, leaving hideous souvenirs of horrid hate and most inhuman fury against the dead, the mutilation of whose bodies rivals the most diabolical ingenuity of savages. Color contributes much to the suggestion of this picture, for the several heads aloft upon high poles are silhouetted against a sky of blood and fire. Death as a single helmeted sentry on horseback in his apparent gloating over the picture recalls the degenerate prince who delights in such scenes of desolation.

"Conquest" is too vivid—and almost vo-



THE RESULT Painted by Bela Ormo (Copyright Rights Applied For)
Destitution, Orphanage, Poverty, Misery, Crime and Prostitution

cal—to require comment. The spellbound horror of the kneeling figure, the confusion and the flight are told in full. Its message is quite clear enough in black and white, but in color it is overwhelming. The flames light up the scene with a glow that, despite the occasion, has its beauty. In fact, this is an aspect of these pictures which creates speculation. They are beautiful in color, with all the old traditional understanding of harmony of hue. What would they have been in the raw brutal color so much affected by some moderns? The use of such glaring pigments would have been appropriate enough; but, would it not have resulted in something so appalling as to cause

the senses to revolt? Art must always consider the senses and sense training. We have been accustomed to look for beauty in a picture and we demand it whether the subject be beautiful or terrible. A terrific picture, a gruesome one is, in some way, less artistic even though more consistent than is one in which some element of the æsthetic still prevails no matter how dire its import.

"The Result," the last of this colossal series, is presented through a pitiful group of refugees. The painting of a group of people is ever a most difficult problem, especially when they are compellingly interesting as a group. In this picture interest is



BELA ORMO

not centered upon any single figure. Each is important and has its story to tell. We look at them separately, they were painted for such examination. There is destitute old age with a world of memories in his eyes; there is brave but well nigh exhausted motherhood, shielding its own to the very gates of death; there is childhood, emaciated and prematurely serious with sorrow and starvation in its frightened glance, and there is young womanhood in the devastation of soul and sordid gaiety of raiment that tell their own story of degradation and shame. Behind these figures is a fantastic background of red wolves and pallid spectres. The faces in this group are presented with all the close attention of portraiture.

Here is the realism of one who paints detail when the occasion demands. About all of these pictures there is a naivete that is foreign to the sophistication of today, and with this a sense of the dramatic that bespeaks the Slav. They are simple and yet full of an intensity of feeling like the wild music of the Hungarian Gypsies. The technique is of a character recommended by the dimensions of the canvases, which are seven feet wide by eight high. The general plan is for simple outline and effects suitable for murals. Against the black draped walls of the exhibition hall these paintings stand out with telling effect. Back of them is the great human drama of the world war and the story of an artist's dreaming alone upon its meaning until his thought took shape in an expression of his horror of Kultur. For this is indeed a true tale of its course and its achievement, beginning in madness and ending in misery. We see his conception of war as the sum total of all evils and feel his hatred of the militarist class of the central empires who have sowed the dragon's teeth.

Of all the people who witnessed the unveiling of these pictures the British women best appreciated them. Among them were some the men of whose families were at the front, and some who had been through the London air raids. They indeed realized the full portent of Kultur and saw in this exhibition a needed reminder and stimulus to righteous indignation. Hate indeed has become a necessity of the situation, a burning and busy hatred of Kultur. Nowhere and to nobody has it brought aught but disaster. The German people suffer under it torments which foreign invasion and domination could never have imposed upon them, and with these disgrace in the eyes of all the world, led by madmen to be despised as fools for centuries to come. All this these pictures tell, vividly and colorfully, until we feel as the artist has felt it, the full weight of the *Curse of Kultur*.